

Strategy Research Project International Fellow

The Republic of Croatia's National Interest in Peacekeeping Operations

by

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United States Army War College
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THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA'S NATIONAL INTEREST IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

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Croatia is a small country in geographical and population terms but has a rich history. At the present time, characterized by rapid development and change in the international situation, as well as emerging new opportunities and threats, the Republic of Croatia must find ways and means to protect its national values and interests. Association with Western democracies, with whom we share the same values and interests, and membership in the UN, NATO and EU provide for the security, stability and economic development of the Republic of Croatia. In addition to gains and benefits, the Republic of Croatia must share common threats and risks, and take an active role in the development and contribution to the common security and stability. To show that it is a reliable and trustworthy partner, Croatia actively participates in UN, NATO and EU peacekeeping activities with diplomatic, police and military personnel.

THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA'S NATIONAL INTEREST IN PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS

Our world is such that many, both states and groups that form around a tendency to terror as a means of action resort to force to achieve their goals. East-West confrontation, however, disappeared, the balance of terror between the superpowers is gone, but our world has hardly become more secure, and peace has not become more stable. Can we be satisfied with such a world? I answer without the slightest hesitation, we cannot!

--Mr. Stjepan Mesic, the President of
the Republic of Croatia¹

This is part of a speech by Mr. Stjepan Mesic, the President of Republic of Croatia at the 64th General Assembly of the United Nations, given on September 24, 2009. If we are not satisfied with the current security situation in the world, the question is: what will we do? We have two choices, to complain about the situation and do nothing or to take an active role in building a more secure and stable world. The Republic of Croatia has taken an active role in building global security and stability for a better and brighter future for all people and nations.

The Perspective of Recent History

The modern period in Croatian history began in 1990. The Croat, after almost 800 years, had the opportunity to do what generations of his ancestors dreamed – declare independence. The Soviet Union collapsed and the fall of Communism throughout Eastern Europe signaled the opportunity to implement similar changes in Yugoslavia. The communist leadership from two of the six Yugoslavian republics (Slovenia and Croatia) demanded a reform of the Yugoslav state organization. Most of the Yugoslav republics, under the influence of Serb leader Slobodan Milosevic, were not ready or willing to implement reforms.

Croatia started the reforms and held its first multi-party elections since World War II in 1990. In those elections, the Communist party was defeated and changes in political and economic life of the Republic of Croatia had begun. The Serbian minority in Croatia was not satisfied with the changes because they lost a great deal of power and influence. In June 1991, the Croatian parliament approved a declaration of independence from Yugoslavia. The Serbian minority, aided by Slobodan Milosevic and the Federal Yugoslav Army, began fighting against the Croatian government and police. The conflict became increasingly violent and in summer 1991 war broke out. Over the next six months, heavy fighting took place, which caused the loss of thousands of human lives and the mass destruction of property.

A UN cease-fire was arranged on January 2, 1992. In February, the United Nations (UN) Security Council approved sending a 14,000-member peacekeeping force to monitor the agreement. However, Croatia fought to regain one-third of the territory lost the previous year. Years of exhausting and arduous negotiations with the Serbs followed. During these unsuccessful negotiations, the Croatian Armed Forces were conducting training, equipping units and planning operations for the liberation of occupied territories. After the last negotiations failed in 1995, the Croatian Armed Forces conducted two operations, "Flash" and "Storm," and the central Croatian region of Krajina, held by the Serbs, was returned to Zagreb's control. Two years later, with UN assistance, the last parts of the Republic of Croatia, Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem were peacefully integrated.

In the fifteen years since the Homeland War, the Republic of Croatia has transformed, slowly but surely, coming a long way from the transition country it was to

the modern European country it is today. In accordance with Croatian historical affiliation to the Western European and Christian community, the Republic of Croatia expressed its desire to join Western multilateral organizations. In 2003, Croatia formally submitted its application to join the European Union (EU). In April 2008, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) invited Croatia to join the alliance at a summit in Bucharest. The Republic of Croatia officially joined NATO in April 2009. Negotiations for Republic of Croatia European Union membership are at an end, and the pre-accession treaty was signed on December 9, 2011. Full Croatian membership is expected by the summer of 2013. After achieving membership in these Western organizations, the Republic of Croatia will achieve its goal: to be in the community of countries with which it shares common values and interests.

Croatia's National Values and Interests

Croatia's national values are rooted in the distant past. Croatia's Constitution reminds us that "The millennial national identity of the Croatian nation and continuity of its statehood began with the formation of the Croatian principalities in the seventh century. The process was continued through the independent medieval state of Croatia established in the ninth century, the Kingdom of the Croats established in the tenth century and other various political forms to the present day."² The course of its entire historical experience and inclusion in the Catholic community have developed and shaped Croatian national values and interests. Today, Croatian national values are an integral part of the basic document of the Republic of Croatia – The Constitution of the Republic of Croatia.

Freedom, equal rights, national and gender equality, peace-making, social justice, respect for human rights, private property rights, conservation of nature and the environment, the rule of law and a democratic multiparty system are the highest values of the constitutional order of the Republic of Croatia.³

Croatian national values are the basis for determining the vital national interests of Republic of Croatia. The vital national interests of the Republic of Croatia are permanent and unchangeable and relate to the protection of the highest values as defined in the Constitution of Republic of Croatia.⁴ These interests also represent the fundamental goals of national security. The vital national interests of the Republic of Croatia are: (1) survival in peace and freedom and the protection of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Croatia, (2) economic prosperity and welfare for all citizens of the Republic of Croatia, (3) favorable positive relations with neighboring countries, and (4) the protection and promotion of national values and resource conservation.⁵ In the protection of vital national interests the Republic of Croatia uses all available and legitimate means, proportionate to the threats that challenge them.

The protection of vital national interests and the realization of strategic policy goals are most directly associated with the alliance in NATO and the achievement of European Union membership.⁶ An alliance with NATO significantly strengthens the Republic of Croatia's national security. Also, membership in the European Union includes the promotion and adoption of European Union standards. Croatia's membership and participation in the European Union provides a framework for securing a majority of her vital national interests.⁷

Croatia's Contribution to Global Security and Stability and the Fight against Global Terrorism

The Republic of Croatia is a relatively small country in terms of geography and population and as such is not serious global player in the international community. This does not mean that such a small country cannot be active or that its activities cannot contribute to global security and stability and the fight against global terrorism. The Republic of Croatia has divided these activities into two types of contributions to global security and stability: internal and external.

Internal activities relate to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of Croatia's civilian authorities and security-intelligence community. The Republic of Croatia recognizes terrorism as a major threat to its national security, to the security of its allies and partners, and to global security. In response to this threat the government issued *The National Anti-terrorism Strategy*. This strategy establishes a general framework of action in the fight against terrorism by providing guidance for the advancement of existing methods, the development of new measures, and mechanisms and instruments for the prevention and control of terrorism.⁸ Croatia's geographic location and the confluence of important travel and trade routes increase the threat of the possibility of the transportation of equipment, technology or materials related to weapons of mass destruction. The availability of small arms, light weapons, and hand-held missile systems constitute a real threat, because of the recent wars and the networking of organized crime groups. The ability of the Republic of Croatia to detect, prevent and defeat the threat contributes to the security of Croatian citizens, neighboring countries and the international community.

External activities are those relating to the Republic of Croatia's relationship and cooperation with other countries or membership in international organizations. According to Croatia's National Security Strategy the Republic of Croatia, with its membership in NATO, has received a guarantee of collective defense as the deterrent to, as well as a possible responses to, the threats it faces. The strategy states, "with NATO countries the Republic of Croatia participates in a system of collective defense, allied defense planning and the structuring of joint security and defense policy. Croatia is also linked with European Union countries in the development of cooperation within the European Security and Defense Policy."⁹ Simultaneous with the security guarantees that NATO membership provides, the Republic of Croatia has taken on new missions and tasks concerning the defense of all Alliance members.¹⁰ In this way, Croatia's geographic security area has become extended. The area now includes the NATO member countries' territory, with the security threats that they might face. The Republic of Croatia must expect that the response to threats to NATO members may require its engagement.

Next, external activity which contributes security and stability to the regional environment is enhancing relations with neighbor countries. "The Republic of Croatia has a special interest in a permanent stabilization and democratization of South East Europe, in ensuring a permanent peace and development of this part of Europe, establishing good neighborly relations based on equality and reciprocity, and in finding a political way based on international law to solve all open issues remaining after the breakup of Former Yugoslavia."¹¹ Good-neighborliness, mutual respect of sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, equality and solving of open issues through

political dialogue are some of the principles that may be the basis for developing relationships with neighboring countries.

By implementing all of these internal and external activities, the Republic of Croatia will prove to be a credible and reliable member of the international community, and it will continue to consistently contribute to global security and stability and the fight against global terrorism.

Croatia's Contribution to Peace Support Operations

Participation in international peace support operations is an important instrument of foreign and security policy of the Republic of Croatia in contributing to international security and stability. Only four years after the end of the Homeland War, in 1999, the Republic of Croatia first sent its armed forces to a UN Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNMOSIL). From that time, the Republic of Croatia has made significant progress in the quality and quantity of its contributions to establishing peace in conflict areas. In the beginning peacekeeping operations were performed mainly by members of the Croatian Armed Forces but, according to an integrated approach supported by the international community that brings together the military, civilian and development components of crisis management, the operation gradually included members of the civilian police, diplomats and representatives of other ministries.¹²

One very important characteristic that distinguishes members of the Croatian Armed Forces, civilian police, diplomats and representatives of other ministries from their counterparts of other nations is their almost unique experience in peacekeeping operations. Almost one-third the territory of the Republic of Croatia was under a UN peacekeeping operation in the period 1992 to 1997. In that period of time, Croats

gained experience in working with UN personnel from different nations that helps them today to better understand the people in countries where Croats participate in peace support operations. This experience and proven record of excellent peacekeeping performance give Croatian personnel in peace support operations credibility and reliability.

In accordance with its capabilities and priorities in foreign and security policy, the Republic of Croatia decided to contribute to the peace support operations conducted by three major international organizations: the United Nations, NATO and the European Union. "In 2010 the Republic of Croatia has participated in 14 peacekeeping operations with nine under the guidance of the UN; two NATO-led operations and three others under the guidance of the EU, with a total of 484 participants, of which 461 were members of the Armed Forces and 23 were civilian experts (19 officers, one representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, and three representatives of the Ministry of Justice)."¹³

The most important and largest Croatian contribution to Peace Support Operations is participation in the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Members of the Croatian Armed Forces were engaged, along with police personnel and Croatian diplomats, as part of a comprehensive international approach to the stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan. In accordance with one of NATO's priorities, building the Afghan security force, the Republic of Croatia decided to focus its contributions on that priority. Nearly half of the 330 members of the Croatian contingent in ISAF conducted education or training for the Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan National Army (ANA). The key elements of the Croatian contingent that directly

support the education and training are: three Operational Mentor Liaison Teams (OMLT), two Police Operational Mentor Liaison Teams (OMLT), an ANA Mi-17 Air training mentor team, an ANA artillery instructor team, an ANA Combat Service Support (CSS) logistics school instructor team, an ANA Engineering school instructor team and an ANA Military Police School. The Republic of Croatia is particularly proud of the fact that NATO, after only one and a half years of Croatian NATO membership, gave her the opportunity to lead the ANA Military Police School. In the spirit of good regional cooperation, the Republic of Croatia invited its neighbors to participate in the ANA Military Police School. Today, members of the Slovenian, Albanian, Montenegrin, and Macedonian Armed Forces work with Croatians in the ANA Military Police School, and it is expected that Bosnia and Herzegovina Armed Forces members will join them in the future.

Although ISAF is its most important peace support operation, the Croatian Armed Forces also participates in the following NATO-led operations: Kosovo Force (KFOR), Kosovo (20 personnel and two transport helicopters), Active Endeavour (radar and intelligence data exchange, and training and exercise participation), and NATO Training Mission – Iraq (conduct training for Iraq Security Force members and make a donation of arms).

Thus, the Republic of Croatia, as a member of the United Nations, makes a major contribution to UN peace support operations. It started its participation in international peacekeeping operations in September 1999 with ten officers of the Armed Forces in the United Nations Observer Mission in Sierra Leone (UNOMSIL). On November 20, 2002 the Republic of Croatia signed a Memorandum of Understanding between the

Croatian Government and the United Nations to contribute to a stand-by arrangement of the UN, in which were defined the military and police facilities with which Croatia can participate in UN operations.

The number of operations in which Croatia participates constantly fluctuates because some of them are terminated, and some for various reasons no longer require the participation of military or civilian personnel from Croatia. The number of Croatian participants in these operations is constantly growing. The number of military personnel in 2010 tripled compared to 2007 (from 46 to 119), yet the number of police officers in 2010 was reduced to 12 due to the transfer of the UN Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Croatia sent a line unit for the first time In 2008, a company of 95 soldiers to participate as part of a UN contingent in United Nation Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights.¹⁴

Such dedicated participation and contribution to UN peace support operations has been noticed by other members of the United Nations. The Republic of Croatia first became a candidate and then, supported by most members of the UN, became a non-permanent UN Security Council member during the period 2008-2009.

Croatia is devoting considerable attention to the training and education of peacekeepers. The Training Center for International Military Operations (CAPSOC) in Rakitje near Zagreb, which has been certified by the UN, conducts pre-deployment training of Croatian and foreign officers and participating in international trade instructors.¹⁵

The Republic of Croatia currently deploys 119 members of the armed forces in nine UN peacekeeping operations (one company, 11 military observes and seven staff

officers). As far as the civil aspect of UN operations, Croatia currently deploys 12 members of the police.

As a candidate for membership in the European Union, the Republic of Croatia has got involved in the security activities of the EU. It participates with members of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in two EU peace support operation: EUPOL (European Union Police Mission) - Afghanistan and EULEX (European Union Rule of Law Mission) - Kosovo. Members of the Croatia Armed Forces are also involved in the EU battle group. "The Battlegroup Concept consists of highly trained, battalion-size formations (1,500 soldiers each) – including all combat and service support as well as deployment capability and sustainability assets. These should be available within 15 days notice and sustainable for at least 30 days (extendable to 120 days by rotation). They should be flexible enough to promptly undertake operations in distant crisis areas (i.e. failing states) under, (but not exclusively) a UN mandate, and to conduct combat missions in extremely hostile environments (mountains, desert, jungle, etc). As such, they should prepare the ground for larger, more traditional peacekeeping forces, ideally provided by the UN or the Member States."¹⁶ Members of the Croatian Armed Forces have participated in the planning and preparation activities of the EU Nordic Battlegroup. Two helicopters (MEDEVAC and transport) were on standby from January 1 to June 30, 2011. Currently, members of the Croatian Armed Forces participate in the preparation and training for the EU Battlegroup 2011/II with members of the German (lead nation), Austrian, Swiss, Irish, Czech, Hungarian, Macedonian and Slovenian Armed Forces. The EU Battlegroup 2011/II will be on standby from July 1 until December 31, 2012. The Croatian Armed Forces will participate with more than 250 troops (an infantry company,

an engineer platoon, a military police squad, staff and medical personnel, a civil-military co-operation (CIMIC) team, a psychological operation (PSYOPS) team, a national logistics element and a national signal team).

While participation and contribution in peace support operations, contribute to the reputation and credibility of the country, they entail certain costs and risks. In the Republic of Croatia all are aware of this: the political leadership, public opinion and the personnel involved in operations are prepared to accept the risks and costs. However, apart from improving Croatia's credibility and reputation, there are certain other benefits that may not be immediately noticeable but are important and contribute to the development of certain other activities in the Republic of Croatia.

Impact of Peace Support Operations on the Croatian Economy and Trade

During the Homeland War, Croatia's economy and trade suffered severe damage. In the current economic situation, the recovery of the Croatian economy and trade is a slow and difficult process. Few manufacturers of military equipment in Croatia felt incentivized and encouraged. Five years ago, the Croatian Ministry of Defense made a decision that the equipment for the participation of the Croatian Armed Forces in operations abroad would be purchased in Croatia if it can be produced there. Also the Croatian Ministry of Defense has invested to help specific development projects in Croatia's defense industry. Today the situation is much better, because Croatian companies are capable of fulfilling the most difficult demands for appropriate equipment for different climatic and geographical conditions for requirements of Croatian Armed Forces members who are deployed in operations abroad. The Republic of Croatia has become one of the few countries in the world where more than 80 percent of the

equipment used by its armed forces abroad is domestically produced. Members of the Croatian Armed Forces wear Croatian camouflage combat uniforms, bullet-proof vests, helmets and boots, are armed with Croatian pistols and rifles and eat “Croatian Army Whole Day Food Rations.” Using equipment from domestic producers, members of Croatian Armed Forces make the best possible advertisement for them. Also, NATO membership enables Croatian companies to produce products for the large market countries of NATO and the rest of the world.

For example, “as a result of their hard work at the IDEX 2011 international defense industry fair in Abu Dhabi, select industries from Croatia have signed contracts to deliver seven thousand helmets to the Egyptian Army, five thousand helmets to South Africa and forty thousand Croatian made uniforms and bullet-proof vests for the Kuwaiti police.”¹⁷

Participation in peace support operations and the presence of the Croatian Armed Forces also enable and facilitate the presence of Croatian private firms in the countries in which operations are conducted. Croatian firms have years of experience in infrastructure construction, the construction of electric installations, oil and natural gas drilling, etc. The cooperation of the Croatian Ministry of Defense and the Croatian Chamber of Economy is very important in this case. A good example of this cooperation is the Croatian Armed Forces’ support to the Croatian economic delegation visit (comprising representatives of eleven companies) to Kabul on July 12-14, 2010. A Croatian-Afghan economic forum was held during the visit, in which the Croatian Chamber of Economy’s members secured an interview with potential business partners, Also, the Croatian Chamber of Economy opened an office in Kabul and established a

Croatian Business Council in Afghanistan. "Croatia became one of only six states with a license for access to all the competitions in the country, which had so far included the U.S., Canada, Pakistan, Russia and India."¹⁸ Aside from economics and trade, another entity of the Republic of Croatia gains benefits by participation in peace support operations: the Croatian Armed Forces.

Increase in Capabilities of the Croatian Armed Forces

The Croatian Armed Forces have conducted a remarkable transformation in the last fifteen years. The transformation of the ministries of defense and armed forces themselves resulted in the reduction of the armed forces' end strength from more than 200,000 members during the Homeland war to the current 18,000 members.

After expressing its wish to accede to NATO in 2003, the Republic of Croatia joined the NATO Membership Action Plan. "The Membership Action Plan (MAP) is a NATO programme of advice, assistance and practical support tailored to the individual needs of countries wishing to join the Alliance. Countries participating in the MAP submit individual annual national programmes on their preparations for possible future membership. These cover political, economic, defense, resource, security and legal aspects."¹⁹ Croatia's defense goals were related to the achievement of the interoperability with NATO practices and procedures. The Croatian Ministry of Defense and the Croatian Armed Forces conducted reforms and changes to existing laws and regulations, began the process of purchasing new military equipment and changed the doctrine of education and training, among other things. All of these changes and reforms were made in cooperation with NATO member states, and included the implementation of bilateral military cooperation in the fields of education and training

and participation in multinational exercise. However, during the ten years of participation in peace support operations, Croatian soldiers, noncommissioned officers and officers have gained valuable experience and lessons learned that have been used in Croatia's preparations for accession to Euro-Atlantic integrations. The experience and lessons learned from operations abroad most helped and had the most impact in achieving interoperability with NATO rules and procedures. Not only did the Croatian defense system benefit from the participation of members of the armed forces in operations abroad, but their members also benefitted individually. Many armed forces members gained invaluable experience, learned useful concepts, developed new skills and benefited from serving in various responsible positions.

All of these improvements, both systemic and individual, contributed to increase the capabilities of the armed forces and defense system as a whole, and better prepare Croatia for future defense and security challenges and the risks of an unpredictable regional and global environment.

Conclusion

During the past decade, the Republic of Croatia has made an impressive transformation, from the former recipient of peacekeeping forces evolving into an active participant in securing peace, to becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and a NATO member. In this new role, the Republic of Croatia is showing its political will and readiness to contribute to global peace and stability, creating mechanisms to effectively respond to the current demands for the preservation of peace, as well as taking opportunities for further development of partnerships in promoting world peace and security.

Endnotes

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